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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0351

UNCLAS SAN SALVADOR 001214

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ES](#) [VZ](#)

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN EMBASSY REQUESTS AVILA STOP CRITICIZING
CHAVEZ

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Venezuelan Charge recently requested that (pro-U.S., center-right) ARENA presidential candidate Rodrigo Avila stop criticizing Chavez and the Venezuelan regime as part of his campaign efforts. The BRV has taken an active interest in the upcoming elections. The request is not likely to change Avila,s efforts or message. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Charge d,affaires Wladimir Ruiz Tirado of Venezuela, circulated a letter to Rodrigo Avila under cover of diplomatic note to all missions in San Salvador, requesting that Avila, presidential candidate of the (pro-U.S., center right) ruling party ARENA, cease criticizing Venezuela, President Hugo Chavez, and symbols of the Venezuelan government as part of ARENA,s campaign efforts. Ruiz mentioned specific instances where Avila has denounced Chavez and the Venezuelan government, including a speech given to military veterans where Avila referred to Chavez as a tyrant, accused Chavez of corrupting the Venezuelan armed forces, and said Chavez had interfered in the dealings of other countries and was now focused on influencing El Salvador.

¶3. (SBU) In the letter, Ruiz stated that the BRV respects the sovereignty and democratic process within other nations and will continue to respect the electoral process in El Salvador. Ruiz requests that Avila afford the BRV the same respect.

¶4. (SBU) Ruiz,s letter has had little effect. Avila and ARENA have not stopped making references to BRV interference and have continued to criticize Chavez,s policies. Subsequent to Ruiz,s request, Avila has spoken out against the BRV,s decision to remove monitors from Human Rights Watch. Local media outlets and politicians continue to point to BRV interference in Nicaragua, Cuba, Bolivia, and Ecuador as evidence that Chavez and the BRV have an active interest in exercising influence in El Salvador. Additionally, ARENA has run TV ads showing Chavez as a menacing figure and linking him to the FMLN.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Concern over the influence of the BRV, Chavez, and AlbaPetroleos runs high among those opposed to the (left-wing) FMLN and will continue to be a key issue in the upcoming elections. It is unlikely that Ruiz's request will have any impact on ARENA,s campaign efforts or rhetoric. Indeed, we expect anti-Chavez rhetoric to be an important part of Avila,s campaign, based on what we believe to be a correct reading of the public attitudes that object to Chavez and his influence in the region.

GLAZER